

Page Denied

Next 1 Page(s) In Document Denied

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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

27 April 1983

SOVIET WEAPON DESIGNERS DENOUNCE PRESIDENT'S ABM INITIATIVE

Summary

More than two hundred Soviet scientists signed a letter in the New York Times denouncing the President's ABM initiative of 23 March. The scientists denied that an effective ABM system could be created and declared themselves convinced that nuclear disarmament is the only way to attain real security. We doubt that this reflects the true feelings of many of the scientists, since the list of signatories is an extraordinarily complete "rogues gallery" of Soviet designers and scientists doing advanced strategic weapons research. The scientists decry the very activity for which they are responsible in the USSR; indeed, several are involved in developing precisely the types of BMD systems they denounce the President for advocating. In light of these facts, it is difficult to see the letter as other than a particularly hypocritical and self-serving example of Soviet propaganda.

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This memorandum was internally initiated in the Office of Scientific and Weapons Research (OSWR). It was prepared by [redacted] OSWR. This paper has been coordinated with the Office of Soviet Analysis and NIO/USSR. Comments and enquiries are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief, Developmental Programs Branch, OSWR, [redacted]

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In a letter in the New York Times of 22 April, a large group of Soviet scientists denounced the creation of new ballistic missile defense (BMD) systems as called for in President Reagan's televised speech of 23 March. The Soviets, "basing ourselves on the knowledge which we as scientists have, and proceeding from our understanding of the very nature of nuclear weapons,... declare in all responsibility that there are no effective defensive means in nuclear war, and their creation is practically impossible." Moreover, the scientists assert that the purpose of a BMD system cannot be truly defensive, because "Such a 'defensive' weapon offers practically nothing to a country that is the target of a sudden massive attack, as it is apparently unable to protect the overwhelming majority of its population."

25X1

They conclude by stating that "every scientist should honestly and clearly, guided by his knowledge and his conscience, declare where the world should go — in the direction of creating new types of strategic weapons, which increase the danger of a mutually destructive conflict, or along the path of curbing the arms race and, subsequently, leading to disarmament. This is the historical moral duty of scientists to humankind. On our part, we are firmly convinced, and this conclusion has been made on the basis of a strict scientific analysis of all aspects of the problem that nuclear disarmament is the only way in which the states and peoples can ensure true security."

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it is doubtless true that many of the signatories have considerable "understanding of the very nature of nuclear weapons." What is less apparent, however, is their commitment to turning away from creating new types of strategic weapons and onto the "path of curbing the arms race."

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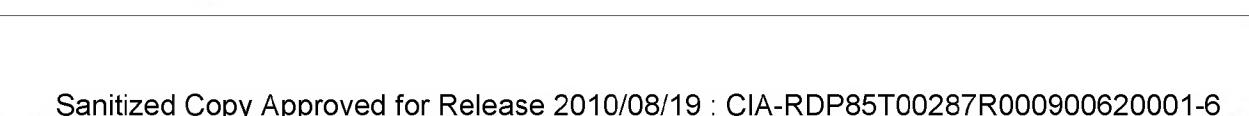
Given the occupations and interests of many of the letter's signatories, they obviously are not as committed to disarmament as their joint statement implies. Currently, the organizations headed by these scientists are expanding development efforts in strategic offensive and defensive weaponry.

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SUBJECT: Soviet Weapon Designers Denounce President's ABM Initiative

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(26 Apr 83)

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SOVIEI SCIENTISTS
APPEAL TO
ALL SCIENTISTS OF
THE WORLD

"We are addressing this letter to all people of goodwill, above all to scientists, since never before has the task of preserving life and peace on Earth been given so high a priority. All who are clearly aware of the realities of our time understand the implications of the incessant stockpiling of death-carrying weapons and the creation of ever new, increasingly monstrous means of mass annihilation. The security of all peoples can be safeguarded by way of nuclear disarmament, through a series of purposeful agreements based on the undeniable principle of equality and equal security."

"In his speech on March 23, 1983, however, the U.S. President offered the American people another option — the creation of a new, gigantic anti-ballistic missile weapons system, allegedly of a purely defensive nature, placed on Earth and in outer space, which would allegedly ensure for the United States absolute security in the event of a world wide nuclear conflict."

"Basing ourselves on the knowledge which we as scientists have, and proceeding from our understanding of the very nature of nuclear weapons, we declare in all responsibility that there are no effective defensive means in nuclear war, and their creation is practically impossible."

"This option of ours fully accords with the authoritative and responsible statement by the presidents and representatives of 36 academies of sciences in various countries of the world, which was signed by, among others, representatives of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA, the British Royal Society, Academie Francaise and the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

"In actual fact, the attempt to create so-called 'defensive weapons' to counter the strategic nuclear force of the other side, which the U.S. President mentioned, will inevitably lead to the emergence of a new element strengthening the 'American first strike potential'. It is not fortuitous that the practical actions by the U.S. administration are centered now on a crash development of precisely that 'potential'. Such a 'defensive weapon' offers practically nothing to a country that is the target of a sudden massive attack, as it is apparently unable to protect the overwhelming majority of its population. The use of an anti-ballistic missile weapons system suits the attacking side best of all, because they are striving to lessen the power of a retaliatory strike. But it cannot, however, fully prevent such a retaliatory strike."

"Thus, the initiative of the U.S. President, who promises to create a new anti-ballistic missile weapons system, is clearly oriented toward a destabilization of the existing strategic balance. By his statement, the President is creating a most dangerous illusion, which may cause an even more threatening spiral of the arms race. We are firmly convinced that this act will result in a sharp lessening of international security, including the security of the United States. The U.S. administration displays utmost irresponsibility on the issue of humankind's very existence."

"Today, when our future and that of our descendants rests on the scales of history, every scientist should honestly and clearly, guided by his knowledge and his conscience, declare where the world should go — in the direction of creating new types of strategic weapons, which increase the danger of a mutually destructive conflict, or along the path of curbing the arms race and, subsequently, leading to disarmament. This is the historical moral duty of scientists to humankind."

"On our part, we are firmly convinced, and this conclusion has been made on the basis of a strict scientific analysis of all aspects of the problem, that nuclear disarmament is the only way in which the states and peoples can ensure true security."

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